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## Marketing Madness: Mental Health in the Mid-'90s

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### ABSTRACT

How do we solve a problem like Elizabeth? This might well have been the title of Elizabeth Wurtzel's 'depression memoir,' *Prozac Nation* (1994); or rather, it might have been the title if the book had been a memoir, rather than a piece of first-person gonzo-style reporting from the field of chemical imbalance. This reading forms the basis of a deeper reconsideration of Wurtzel's position in the popular imagination as the 'voice of a generation.' In the public imagination, mid-'90s culture in America is inextricably linked with irony, depression, and apathy. It may be a Canadian writer who is credited with popularising the term 'Generation X' (Douglas Coupland, in 1991), but the blankness and indeterminacy of its signification seemed to speak directly for a generation approaching adulthood in the nexus between the conservative Republicanism of the Reagan and (first) Bush years and the ostensible liberalism of the saxophone-sound tracked Clinton era. With her keen wit and canny publisher, Elizabeth Wurtzel capitalised on the 'representative' function of her writing, which is nowhere clearer than in the epilogue that gives *Prozac Nation* its title.

### KEYWORDS

Wurtzel; Wallace; misogyny; mental health

God have mercy on the man Who doubts what he's sure of Bruce Springsteen, *Brilliant Disguise*

### In the beginning

Elizabeth Wurtzel was one of the first people in the U.S. to be treated with fluoxetine (the generic name for Prozac) but owing to the success of SSRIs as a form of treatment their use quickly became more widespread. This can be connected to their relatively mild side effects, in contrast to MAOs (monoamine oxidase inhibitors) or TCA (tricyclic antidepressants).<sup>1</sup> That SSRIs were more generally tolerable by the general population led to an increase in their prescription, though within the context of the for-profit healthcare system of the U.S, this means not only that doctors were more likely to recommend SSRIs as a treatment, but that patients – consumers – were more likely to request their prescription. This occurs in the context of direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceutical products and the profitability of patented properties, both of which are implicated in the expansion of diagnostic criteria; the first encourages self-diagnosis through a deliberately vague depiction of symptoms, and the second is implicated in the

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expansion of pathologized states (that is, states of distress that meet the criteria for clinical intervention) as inscribed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Sadness is big business in America, as Wurtzel suggested in the epilogue from which *Prozac Nation* takes its title, pointing to both the increase in prescription and the media interest in the phenomenon, which prompted her to suggest that there had been ‘a mainstreaming of mental illness in general and depression in particular’ (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 297).

In his extensive study of depression through the ages, Clark Lawlor calls this ‘pathological sadness’ the ‘New Depression,’ emerging in the late 1970s and early ’80s as the conceptualisation of depression shifted from the psychoanalytic to the biological, a shift that he also connects to the changing scene of mental health as it shifted from the institution (or asylum) to care in the community (Lawlor 2012, 161). The codification of diagnostic criteria based on external observables (sleep disruption, appetite changes, etc.) allowed a ‘cleaner’ definition, but this came at the expense of aetiology, as one might expect in a shift away from the talking-therapy that constitutes the primary treatment model of psychotherapies (Lawlor 2012, 163). In a strictly biochemical model, sadness becomes its own proof, and intervention in the neurochemical network promises to alleviate the imbalance that ostensibly leads to it. Wurtzel’s epilogue treats this at a national level, outlining a culture of depression and imagining ‘a whole slew of people for whom simple existence is fraught with intense misery’ (Wurtzel [1994] 1995, 300). In her cultural diagnosis of a loss of faith in the future, Wurtzel gestures towards the dissolution of the certainties of post-45 America as precipitating factors:

In the world that we live in, randomness does rule. And this lack of order is a debilitating, destabilizing thing. Perhaps what has come to be placed in the catch-all category of depression is really a guardedness, a nervousness, a suspicion about intimacy, any of the perfectly natural reactions to a world that seems to be perilously lacking in the basic guarantees that our parents expected: a marriage that would last, employment that was secure, sex that wasn’t deadly (Wurtzel [1994] 1995, 301–2)

What Wurtzel outlines here is that same sense of precarity Lauren Berlant saw as a rubric for organising new aesthetic forms emerging in the 1990s ‘to register a shift in how the older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies shape adjustments to the structural pressures of crisis and loss that are wearing out the power of the good life’s traditional fantasy bribe without wearing out the need for a good life’ (Berlant 2011, 7). By formulating ‘the good life’ as a scene in the psychoanalytic sense (following the work of Jacques Lacan), Berlant points explicitly to its function as a site of normativity, which is to say the role of fantasy in shaping reality. Building on Berlant’s work on the shaping of intimate publics, I suggest here that more careful attention to the genre of *Prozac Nation* and to its contemporaneous reception is necessary to properly situate it within the landscape of American literature in the 1990s. Although branded as a memoir and sitting at the forefront of the well-documented memoir boom of the 1990s, Wurtzel’s writing is better understood in a mode of experiential journalism that finds its roots in the New Journalism of Joan Didion and others. Wurtzel first came to national attention when she won the 1986 *Rolling Stone* College Journalism Award for a piece on Lou Reid, after all, and *Prozac Nation* is as much a story of her musical tastes as it was her experience of

psychic distress. This article will thus read Wurtzel's writing within a broader context of neoliberal individuation, misogyny, and self-representation in the American literary culture of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century.

One of the more significant out-workings of this context was the erasure of Wurtzel's Jewish identity in popular and critical comment. I suggest that closer attention to Wurtzel's Judaism and its place in *Prozac Nation* is necessary to understand the complexity of her relationship with the American confessional tradition; in drawing parallels to Bruce Springsteen's use of religious frameworks in his performance of iconoclasm I point to the legacies of masculinism inscribed in that tradition, closely connected to the rugged individualism valorised as part of America's national mythologising. I further suggest that readings of Wurtzel's work as solipsistic or narcissistic (in a pejorative sense) underestimate the difficulties of negotiating Jewish identity in America, particularly the identity of Jewish woman. Notable exceptions to this oversight can be found in work by Melissa Friedling and, more than a decade later, Amy Tziporah Karp. These critics share a central concern: for Friedling, this is expressed as a sense of 'remaining elsewhere' experienced by the 'Jewish woman' (Friedling 1996, 106). Karp's preferred term is 'strangeness,' which she connects closely to a model of 'incomplete assimilation and the struggle to "pass" as white' by which the 'belonging' of Jewish Americans is rendered unstable and precarious (Karp 2017, 62–3). To consider the ways in which Wurtzel's work intervenes in the site of fantasy at the level of citizenship (i.e. national belonging) one must parse properly her cultural, religious, and gendered identity. In reconsidering the genre of Wurtzel's work and paying close attention to the ways in which these categories inflect her work and its popular reception, we come to a better understanding of the significance of Wurtzel's work and its capacity to complicate the mainstreaming of mental health as an individualistic discourse.

## Write what you know

In positioning *Prozac Nation* within the field of experiential journalism I agree with Daniel Worden's assertion that 'the focus on lived experience and material reality emphasized in the New Journalism [of the '60s and '70s], as opposed to the 'history-as-text' play of the postmodern novel, is due a re-evaluation as a major component of post-war literary history and the immediate context of the contemporary memoir boom' (Worden 2017, 161). In such a context, I think a much more careful working through of the relationship between New Journalism and experiential writing is necessary to give full account of this 'personality based' form of journalism, particularly in the 1990s, when the rise of reality television and nascent internet culture came together to metastasise celebrity culture at the very moment Elizabeth Wurtzel emerged to dazzle – and outrage – cultural and literary commentators of all stripes. This expansion of celebrity culture reached a head in the first decade of the twenty-first century and was only derailed by the rise of social media and the 'democratisation' or even banalisation of celebrity. As Georg Frank has it, this is closely connected to the rising levels of general wealth in 'developed' nations and the 'devaluation' of wealth as a marker of status: 'When material wealth has become inflationary, then, according to the laws governing the expansion of human desires and aspiration, the socialisation of this still-elite status is imminent' (Frank 2019, 9). More recently there has been something of a revaluation of this period, prompted in

part by the release of the *Framing Britney Spears* documentary (2021, dir. Samantha Stark), which casts new light on the intersection of celebrity, misogyny, invasive media attention, and mental health in the 2000s.

At the same time, this appetite for suffering is not a new one. As I intimated in ‘Double Vision’ (Malone 2021), the connection between abnegation and authority has been traced back to early women mystics and other penitents by author Jennifer Egan, who in 2000 published an essay entitled ‘Power Suffering’ in which she explored how the embodied practices associated with a mode of affective piety bestowed a certain authority on those mystics who undertook them, their ‘self-deprivation’ effectively a promissory note for their appearance in arenas of power (primarily the religious sphere) where they would not otherwise have been sanctioned to appear (Egan 1999). Egan makes the somewhat speculative suggestion that we might see a turn-of-the-century parallel in the figures of Hillary Clinton, whose ‘outright power’ had then ‘been tempered by her dignified and mostly silent endurance of the most public marital humiliation ever’ (Egan 1999, 112), a claim that gains resonance in light of the virulent misogyny that greeted Clinton’s presidential campaign. Egan also drew on Diana Spencer’s reputation as a kind of secular saint, but saw in the figure of the Princess of Wales a more troubling tendency, her spectacular suffering untethered from any greater power: ‘Lacking any such divine affiliation, the suffering our culture elicits from its women seems doubly tragic – pointless in itself and, in most cases, a distraction from the real sources of power they might otherwise be able to tap’ (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> This appetite for (women’s) suffering, whether fed through tabloid exploitation or now couched in the rhetoric of ‘care’ and ‘recuperation’ as part of a wider turn in public discourse on mental health certainly seems to be insatiable.

Dismissals of Wurtzel’s work (of which there have been plenty) have for years operated in terms which are (barely) covertly misogynistic, and, in the case of early responses to *Prozac Nation*, demonstrate a cultural ignorance around mental health that we would like to think long behind us at this much-enlightened point in the twenty-first century. A sampling of reviews written at the time of the book’s release demonstrates this: writing for *Vulture*, Walter Kirn’s reading of this ‘long moan’ of a book was titled, ‘For White Girls Who Have Considered Suicide Elizabeth Wurtzel’s *Prozac Nation* is a Work of Singular Self-Absorption’ (Kirn 1993); in *Newsweek*, Karen Schomer refuted the idea that there was anything revelatory or representative in Wurtzel’s writing, describing her depression as megalomaniacal (a description that, in itself, shows the derisory attitude to pathologised conditions) and suggesting that rather than giving a state of the nation account of Gen X, *Prozac Nation*, ‘reads more like the self-absorbed rantings of an adolescent’ (Schomer 1994). Wurtzel’s ‘nation,’ by Schomer’s account, is a ‘nation of one,’ but the tune of Wurtzel’s song of self is not one she enjoys – we could learn more from Nirvana’s ‘All Apologies,’ by Schomer’s reckoning.<sup>3</sup>

This dismissive attitude emerges, in part, from what these reviewers saw as Wurtzel’s ‘presumptuous’ insertion of herself into the pantheon of ‘depression writing’: ‘there’s not a lot of shape to *Prozac Nation*, which suggests Wurtzel chose to ignore the formal lesson of her hero Plath’s poetry: Hysteria has more impact when its contained. Sadness in art needs strict border to press up against; otherwise, it’s just a muddy overflow’ (Kirn 1993). Kirn’s suggestion that Sylvia Plath is a hero of Wurtzel’s is a rather presumptive reading. As I have suggested, Wurtzel is far more likely to wax lyrical over Bruce Springsteen or

Patti Smith than she is over any poet. When Virginia Woolf pops up in *Prozac Nation* it is in the company of Brian Jones and Natalie Wood (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 126); the ‘sorrow and terror’ of Plath’s ‘Tulips’ is surpassed by ‘every Bob Dylan song that has ever touched [Wurtzel]’ (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 228). Kirn wants greater separation between ‘Wurtzel the author and Wurtzel the character,’ but assumes in this that *Prozac Nation* operates in the mode of earlier New Journalism, where the techniques of fiction were put to work in service of a journalistic mode that highlighted a crisis in perspective – in objectivity – following the upheavals of the 1960s. What Kirn seemed unwilling to grasp, and what we might only begin to understand in retrospect, was that the times they were a-changin’, and Wurtzel was way ahead of the curve.

To properly understand *Prozac Nation*, we must consider the shifts in online culture that began in the early ’90s and would go on to transform journalism and the publishing industry *in toto*.<sup>4</sup> As G. Thomas Couser says in his exploration of memoir, ‘We can understand memoir fully only if we see it as one of a large and ever expanding set of practices people employ to represent actual lives’ (Couser 2012, 24). It is Couser too who insists that in life-writing, as in other literary modes, genre matters, which is the crux of my intervention here, both in my insistence that Wurtzel’s lack of ‘literary’ form (i.e. those techniques New Journalism borrowed from novelistic writing) need not be seen as a failure of some kind, but also in my suggestion that the confessionalism of her work belongs not to the American tradition so much as that of Judaism. Broadly speaking, the area of most interest in relation to this nebulous concept of ‘literariness’ is that of ‘blogging,’ or writing recorded as a ‘weblog’ and available to a (usually anonymous) internet audience. Little attention has been paid to the rise of weblogs and its continued influence on literary cultures, which tends to give a rather skewed account of the changes occurring during the last twenty-years of the twentieth century insofar as the production and consumption of writing (be that writing literary, journalistic, instructional, ‘social,’ confessional, and so on) is concerned. There are a number of exceptions to this, such as Andrew Keen’s *The Cult of the Amateur* (2007) or Mary Cross’s *Bloggerati, Twitterati* (2011), though these tend to focus on the internet as a discrete phenomenon with some distinctive effect on ‘life’ in a more general sense, often conflating ‘social media’ with ‘the internet.’<sup>5</sup>

One of the crucial features of blogging, as distinguished from more standard journalistic forms, was its immediacy and interactivity, the latter usually enabled through the comment function on weblogs which has by now become a standard feature on websites where blogging is the house style, such as *Thought Catalogue* or *Gawker* (probably the most notorious of these sites). The feedback loop of immediate audience reception on early sites such as LiveJournal created a sense of community for those who chose to make public their lives on those forums while contributing to a novel mode of microcelebrity in which the reader’s interest was directed towards the writer themselves as much as to the subject about which they might be writing: the impetus to be known by others is strong, as reflected in the massive uptake of social media such as Facebook, where the unwieldiness of diaristic platforms such as LiveJournal was streamlined through the standardisation of personal information (name, age, relationship status).<sup>6</sup> As one of the first bloggers, Justin Hall, tells it, even ostensibly cutting-edge publications like *Wired* magazine were slow to realise the foundational truth of the social internet: ‘the people are the



content’ (Hall 2021). In such a framework, voice is a result not of style but of personality, which is to say that the presence of the author in the text has a markedly different quality than earlier forms of both fiction and non-fiction writing.<sup>7</sup>

The conflation of writer (or persona) and content was one factor in a new journalistic era; another was the expansion of what was considered newsworthy, as the expansion of celebrity culture redefined the parameters of the public figure. *Gawker*’s infamous mission statement promised that the website ‘would publish any information, as long as it was true and interesting’ (Gajda 2017/18, 531). The website reached its apex (or nadir) in popular culture when then-editor Emily Gould appeared on the Larry King show to defend a feature on the site known as the ‘Gawker Stalker’ in which readers would send in tips on the location of celebrities in Manhattan (Jacobs 2008, 41). Paparazzo techniques aside, Gould’s term at the helm of *Gawker* was also influential in expanding the remit of the site through a form of personal or personality-based writing, as Gould documented her relationship problems and eventual break-up on the site. A particularly telling quotation in Gloria Jacobs’ article on Gould and blogging comes from Gerry Marzorati, the editor of *The New York Times Magazine* who put Gould on the magazine’s cover in 2008, to the consternation of many. Defending the decision, Marzorati wrote:

One of the things we are most interested in at the magazine are those lifestyle issues — what we call Way We Live Now issues — that blend personal narratives with larger political or ethical or philosophical concerns . . . How the Internet is re-describing how we understand privacy, intimacy and personal history is, I think, such an issue . . . (Jacobs 2008, 41–2)

As Jacobs noted, Marzorati’s statement, and indeed his decision to run Gould’s essay, marked a clear understanding of the transformation of communicative writing – including journalism – ushered in by evolving internet technology; a wide-reaching transformation that Wurtzel seemed to understand by some alchemy of intuition and timing.

In those discussions of sincerity and feeling that have permeated discussions of late twentieth and early twenty-first century literature, the link between the proliferation of actual humans writing minimally mediated personal content on the public forums of the world wide web has rarely been cited as a significant factor, which seems now like something of an oversight. Amy Hungerford made the following claims:

I think there is something to be said for “the new sincerity,” as people call it, associating it with Wallace and Dave Eggers. That’s an element in the kinship between creative nonfiction and fiction and the desire for what feels like a living voice on the page, a voice that has enough presence to feel like human presence. One could say, “Well, we’re longing for the intensity of human presence that our mediation and devices have made difficult to access now.” Do I really want to make a generalization that large? I’m not sure (Hungerford 2017).

Hungerford hedges her claims by asking how different absorption in an internet-enabled device is to absorption in a newspaper, though in reality this gulf is massive for many reasons (one may finish with a newspaper, for one thing, whereas the internet has no final vista). What I am more interested in here is Hungerford’s assertion of the desire for some felt semblance of human presence in literature. This metaphysics of presence spills over from the first-person to the fictional, as Hungerford imagines it, blurring the line between the two as it does and resurrecting the Actually Existing Author from the tomb of language. As with autobiographical writing, the author’s presence is a promise, a



marker of the human quality of their work. This is a question not of realism, but of reality: in the age of the social internet, each of us writes our autobiography reflexively, in any number of ways, day-to-day. We are always telling (on) ourselves, without even the retrospective distance that tends to mark memoiristic writing.

Indeed, Hungerford's formula is rather back-to-front when it comes to early internet writing, prior to the emergence of the full-blown attention economy (made possible by the rise of the smartphone and the portability of the social internet). Those living online, and documenting it textually, were not subject to the same self-reflexive editing that we now understand as a standard part of self-curation, linked to the shift from anonymity to appearance. The idea that 'voice' (which, as above, I suggest we might increasingly associate with personality rather than style) is singled out by Hungerford might be anecdotally connected to the ongoing popularity of the podcast form and the unexpected idea that the internet might be making us better listeners – though whether this is at the expense of our skills as readers remains to be seen.<sup>8</sup> It seems odd in this framework to look to fiction to provide this sense of presence, for there voice will always be mediated by the technology of text, and the promise the author makes to us as we enter their world is that none of what we read will be true. This raises questions about the place of fiction – particularly, I would suggest, the novel form – in the twenty-first century, echoing concerns raised in the '90s by Wurtzel's more 'literary' peers, notably David Foster Wallace (in 'E Unibus Pluram') and Jonathan Franzen ('Perchance to Dream').

## Inserting oneself

It is as true as it is cliché to say that David Foster Wallace is the poster boy for American literature in the 1990s, inheriting that mantle of localised celebrity from the East Coast Brat Pack who were his generational peers, though light years away stylistically – and geographically, with Wallace grafting his authorial personae onto a recognisably mid-western personality type, full of self-effacement, stated distrust of urbanite glamour, and that emphasis on a reserved geniality that played very differently in real life than it did on the page; Mary Karr has called Wallace's early approaches to her 'obsequious' (Rereading David Foster Wallace, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqN52yKI4pg&t=1416s> 2014).<sup>9</sup> Nor was Wallace impervious to the lure of celebrity, as Wurtzel intimated in a short piece for *New York Magazine* after Wallace's death, in which she reflected on their brief acquaintance (Wurtzel 2008). In a typically mean-spirited piece on that authorial coupling, in which Wurtzel is referred to as 'some self-obsessed cokehead slut,' one of the gossip sites reporters suggested that the reason for their pairing, from Wallace's side, might have been Wurtzel's 'fucking leotard and perhaps her nebulous promise to impart upon his serious asset [*Infinite Jest*, one assumes, though the double entendre is plain] some sort of value-unlocking sense of "buzz"' (Moe 2008). The language here is a fairly typical example of that pervasive tabloid misogyny that I had pointed to throughout this article, though such thinking is by no means evident only in 'lowbrow' corners of the internet or news media. Wallace's biographer, D. T. Max, described Wallace's short story, 'The Depressed Person,' as Wallace's 'way of getting even with Wurtzel for treating him as a statue (or, she would say, for refusing to have sex with him).' Where once, Max suggests, Wallace had found Wurtzel's 'brazen' attitude to literary stardom a bracingly

refreshing change of pace from his own endlessly recursive anxieties about art and status, by the time the story was written Wallace had been liberated ‘from desire [and] he now saw that her love of the spotlight was just ordinary self-absorption’ (Max 2012).

Wallace is an illuminating figure here because he was as well-known as a writer of first-person journalism as he was a novelist, with the two strands of his work closely intertwined in the propagation of his authorial persona; it is hardly a stretch to suggest that these twin techniques meet in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), a collection whose central conceit is the interview of various men by an unnamed interlocutor identified in the language of various respondents as a woman. I am not alone in making this observation, as attested to by a chapter in Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), ‘Forty-Minute Lunch’ that parodies this very tendency. In ‘Forty Minute Lunch’ Egan tunes her authorial dial to the frequency of Wallace to offer a parodic rendering of that author’s stylistic tics, doubly lampooning the industrial celebrity profile complex, whereby an interviewer attempts to make something interesting happen amongst the carousel of promotional interviews. The crux of the story is journalist Jules Jones’s attempted rape of starlet Kitty Jackson during a business lunch over which he is ostensibly interviewing her. It is, at the same time, a deconstruction of those clumsy fumblings with the inner life of the other that constitute some part of that famous Wallacian (authorial) anxiety.

The piece Jones is writing is supposed to be about Kitty Jackson and yet, he keeps ‘mentioning – “inserting”, as it may seem [himself] into the story,’ a forcible insertion that culminates in his attempt to penetrate her without her consent, recounting his ‘longing to slit Kitty open like a fish and let her guts slip out,’ and his ‘second, corollary desire to break her in half and plunge my arms into whatever pure, perfumed liquid swirls within her’ (Egan [2010] 2011, 187). Jones continues:

I want to rub [that pure, perfumed inner essence] onto my raw, ‘scrofulous’ (ibid.), parched skin in hopes that it will finally be healed. I want to fuck her (obviously) and then kill her, or possibly kill her in the act of fucking her (‘fuck her to death’ and ‘fuck her brains out’ being acceptable variations on this basic goal). What I have no interest in doing is killing her and then fucking her, because it’s her life – the inner life of Kitty Jackson – that I so desperately long to reach.

As it turns out, I do neither (Egan [2010] 2011, 187)

Despite the journalist’s carnal intent, he is rendered impotent by Kitty’s defensive insertion of a ‘small Swiss army knife’ into his calf (Egan [2010] 2011, 188); once penetrated himself, the journalist turns and runs: ‘By now I’m bellowing and honking like a besieged buffalo, and Kitty is running away, her tawny limbs no doubt dappled with light falling through the trees, though I’m too distressed even to look’ (ibid.).

It is evident that this is a parodic commentary on celebrity culture, first-person journalistic/memoiristic writing, and the contemporary appetite for ‘reality,’ particularly when that ‘reality’ takes the form of female suffering, rather than any sort of moralistic condemnation of Wallace himself. At the same time, Egan’s piece roundly lampoons not only Wallace but a longer tradition of men writing women: an extended reference to Kitty’s shoulders and their resemblance to ‘two little squabs’ (Egan [2010] 2011, 183) borrows directly from John Irving’s *The World According to Garp* (1976), for instance.

One does not have to look far, however, to find an analogous passage in Wallace's journalism. In 'Shipping Out,' the celebrated account of the author's time on a luxury cruise ship (gee whiz!), Wallace writes the following of one of the ship's employees:

I have acquired and nurtured . . . a searing crush on my cabin steward, Petra, she of the dimples and broad candid brow, who always wore a nurse's starched and rustling whites and smelled of the cedary Norwegian disinfectant she swabbed my bathrooms down with, and who cleaned my cabin within a centimeter of its life at least ten times a day but could never be caught in the actual act of cleaning [he tried] – a figure of magical and abiding charm, and well worth a postcard all her own (Wallace 1996).

Whether Wallace's relative attraction to employees of the crew manning the ship upon which he was paid to holiday is of significant journalistic import, the reader may decide for themselves.

Josh Roiland is one of the few critics to look at Wallace's journalism as a central part of his oeuvre, using the term 'literary journalism' to describe the author's forays into experiential writing, a phrase taken from the work of Norman Sims.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, Christoph Ribbat wrestled with the unwieldy coinage of 'New New Journalism' to discuss Wallace's first-person writing, in 'Seething Static: Notes on Wallace and Journalism' from *Consider David Foster Wallace* (2010). Roiland and Ribbat overlap with Lee Konstantinou in their suggestion that the persona of Wallace's journalism is not directly interchangeable with the person of the author but that said persona has nevertheless played a large part in shaping the popular cultural perception of Wallace (Konstantinou, Wallace's 'Bad' Influences 2018).

Both Roiland and Ribbat identify Joan Didion as a precursor to Wallace's journalistic efforts too, which may be even more apt when one considers the aura of celebrity attached to Didion for much of her career. Ribbat writes:

While in terms of style, Didion's terse work does not bear much resemblance to Wallace's essays, her programmatic ideas on writing are reflected by central notions in his nonfiction. "How it felt to me" – this, Joan Didion notes, was the guiding principle of her journalistic work. Wallace's take seems remarkably similar (Ribbat 2010).

In this mode of experiential journalism – the same mode I am suggesting we ought to understand as Wurtzel's primary genre or technique – the perspective of the journalist (the writer) is an inherent and essential part of the work. The journalist is not an objective recorder of facts, but a participant-observer in the anthropological (or even pseudo-sociological) sense.<sup>11</sup> Broadly speaking, the insertion of the self is the hallmark of experiential journalism, even when it is recast as 'literary journalism': the reporter is not a neutral instrument for recording facts and events but is instead a distinct eye (I) reporting their own perspective and understanding of events. This is somewhat complicated in Wallace's work by the cultivation of the character of journalist, i.e. the figure who appears as Wallace in his journalistic writing. When Roiland follows Sims' account of literary journalists as writers who 'recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered' to suggest that 'Wallace was awash in this consciousness; it compelled him to be curious and caused him to chronicle nearly everything he encountered' (Roiland 2012, 26), the question one is left with is just what consciousness we are to understand Wallace as awash in, if his own experiential

journalism comes through the prism of an experiencing self that is at least in part a patently fictive being. Or rather, Wallace writes journalistically as an author of fiction: he promises he'll tell us the truth, as a liar.

My contention here is that David Foster Wallace's influence might be understood better through this lineage and through closer attention to his first-person journalistic writing and the persona that drives that writing; once we begin to see this (and to consider the pervasiveness of misogyny in literary culture), we start to close the gap of cultural cache between Wallace and Wurtzel and to better understand the distinctiveness of *Prozac Nation* as a piece of first-person reporting from the frontlines of depression. Indeed, Wurtzel anticipated and rebutted many of the criticisms that were levelled at her in her writing, discussing with acute self-awareness the persona she developed as a way to manage her depressive incidents:

I had developed a persona that could be extremely melodramatic and entertaining. It had, at times, all the selling points of madness, all the aspects of performance art, I was always able to reduce whatever craziness I'd experienced into the perfect anecdote, the ideal cocktail party monologue, and until that final year of real lows, I think most people would have said that when I wasn't being carted off to the emergency room I was fun (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 290)<sup>12</sup>

*Prozac Nation* is an unpacking of this persona, couched in a journalistic mode where Wurtzel's distinct experiences are parsed as part of a generational tendency to depression, an element that is strongest in the book's epilogue.<sup>13</sup> It is in this section that Wurtzel seeks to move from the inside out, using her experiences of depression as a framework to think through some wider 'societal malaise,' just as Joan Didion saw and presented the scenes she witnessed in Haight-Ashbury as 'the evidence of atomisation, the proof that things fall apart' (Didion [1961] 2008, xi). Where Didion has undoubtedly achieved heavyweight status in the world of American letters, though, Wurtzel is still held slightly apart: too messy, too histrionic. Too weird. Too close for comfort.

## Is that you, baby?

In the opening moments of his 2018 Broadway concert, available on Netflix, Bruce Springsteen addresses his audience with these words:

DNA, your natural ability, the study of your craft, a development of and devotion to an aesthetic philosophy.

Balls.

Naked desire for fame, love, adoration, attention, women, sex, a buck. Them if you want to take it all the way out to the end of the night, you will need a furious fire in your belly that just don't quit burnin'.

These are some of the elements that will come in handy should you come face to face with 80,000 screaming rock 'n' roll fans' (Springsteen 2018).

Springsteen tells his audience here that he comes from 'a boardwalk town, where everything is tinged with just a bit of fraud.' These fans, he says, gather for what amounts to a magic show, and Springsteen himself is a conjuror, not a wizard. Springsteen goes on

to 'reveal' to his audience what they already know: he's never been a street-corner punk, a drag racer, or any of the other characters that inhabit his songs. He is, as he has always been, a guitar player, a musician; he's 'never held an honest job in his entire life,' 'never done any hard labour,' never worked nine-to-five, never worked five days a week, never seen the inside of a factory – 'and yet,' he says, 'it's all I've ever written about.' All the stories he tells in his songs recount events, circumstances, difficulties, of which he himself has 'absolutely no personal experience.' The crowd goes wild. 'I made it all up,' shrugs the Boss, 'That's how good I am.' Springsteen is, it turns out, giving testimony, giving praise: rock and roll saved his soul, giving him a truer sense of being through its promise of liberation in all forms. Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan show in 1956 came to make real on the promises of America, as Springsteen frames it here: the pursuit of happiness becomes the possibility of fun – which is to say, desire, and pleasure.

Rock 'n' roll taught the 'kids' to want more and gave them the means to get it: 'that fucking guitar.' For 25 dollars, Bruce Spingsteen's mother purchased his freedom, as he tells it. At seven years old, lessons were too boring for Bruce, and the guitar was about to be returned – but not before he performed a show for the other local children. He didn't 'play' a show, of course, because he couldn't. But as he tells it, he did everything else. Had I the space here, I would offer a full account of Springsteen's confession, but I will hope that this material suffices to show the knowingly self-referential, and even self-mocking, tone of Springsteen's preaching. All this is to make overt that fundamental truth upon which Springsteen's career has been built: it's art. Performance art, at that. Bruce Springsteen never wanted to get away from anything other than the nine-to-five grind. More than this, he wanted, as he says nakedly, fame, adoration, attention. And he knew how to get it. Emerging from the same 1970s scene as Patti Smith, Chris Kraus, and Kathy Acker, Springsteen found mainstream success through mobilising the masculinist mythos of 'working class' America.

Elizabeth Bird discusses Springsteen's 'image' and his transformation to 'cultural icon' at some length, paying close attention to Springsteen's journey as an artist and drawing on many of the 'literary' readings of Springsteen's work. I will leave readers to discover Bird's detailed and compelling reading for themselves, and to see how much she has to tell us about image, authenticity, and celebrity in American culture (Bird 1994). More pertinent here is Andrew Greeley's investigation of Springsteen's 'Catholic imagination,' which to my mind has more than a passing resemblance on Amy Hungerford's work on Don DeLillo. Both point to Catholicism as a form of minority identity within America within the Puritan/'WASP' framework upon which the settler-colonialist nation was built. Greeley offers us the following 'word' on the Catholic imagination: 'Unlike the other religions of Yahweh, Catholicism has always stood for the accessibility of God in the world. God is more like the world than unlike it,' suggesting too that Springsteen's Catholic appeal is a distinctly bodily one, in which appeals are made 'to the whole person, not just the head' (Greeley 1988). Greeley's thesis is more than realised in the Broadway eulogising discussed above, and it has much to tell us about Wurtzel's attachment to Springsteen despite the significant differences between his Catholicism and her Judaism.

This refutes those readings that seek to ignore Wurtzel's personhood in its fullness, to elide that 'strangeness' Karp marks in her work (Karp 2017, 62–3). The marks of this 'difference' are overt in Wurtzel's work, serving to problematise the 'representativeness' of her work insofar as Protestant America seeks to imagine itself a nation without a past.

For Wurtzel, history was not so easily dismissed, as we see in her reflections on the notion of potential imagined in Judaism and its distinction from that right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness':

Sometimes I think part of the problem relates to ethnicity. We Jews do not have a concept of unconditional love. The God of the Old Testament is judgmental, jealous and vengeful. He gets mad and He gets even. The notion of turning the other cheek, the idea that faith is more important than deeds, these are distinctly Christian concepts. Some say that the difference between Catholic guilt and Jewish guilt is that the former emanates from the knowledge that we are all born already fallen, that there is nothing we can ever do to overcome the original sin; the latter springs from a sense that every one of us was created in God's image and has the potential for perfection. So Catholic guilt is about impossibility, while Jewish guilt is about an abundance of possibility.

I think of my own possibility. I think of the way it is wasted. The way it will always be wasted because I'm sitting here waiting for someone to love me as is (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 225)

We see here a clear point of departure from the ostensibly Christian underpinnings of the American model of citizenship with its promise of that inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as Wurtzel highlights the sense of responsibility so central to Judaism, closely connected to the 613 mitzvot that constitute the Old Testament covenant between God and his chosen people. The guidance of the mitzvot does not negate free will but suggests instead that the individual must choose how closely they follow these laws, and thus how closely they keep their covenant. Whereas the New Testament preaches the doctrine of forgiveness and salvation based on the close personal relationship to Jesus imagined in both Catholic and Protestant Christian denominations, the Old Testament makes no such promises, offers, as Wurtzel is at pains to emphasise, no certainty of unconditional love. At the same time, as the designation of 'chosen people' suggests, there exists in the Jewish tradition a strong emphasis on the perfectability of people: as Friedling has it, to be Jewish is to be chosen, 'but unable to choose' (Friedling 1996, 120). Friedling sees Wurtzel's sense of precariousness as due in part to the disruption of divorce, which she understands as interrupting familial relationships so that Wurtzel must 'choose' whether to accept her maternal inheritance or her father's atheism. Cleaving to her Jewish identity is a means of refusing that collapse of values associated with the proliferation of choice that comes with the collapse of 'the older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies,' per Berlant.

I am also interested in what this means for thinking about genre in Wurtzel's work, given the distinction between Christian and Jewish confessional practices. In contrast to Christian traditions, Judaism has no model of individual confession: confession is made in the plural form, as Robert Milch outlines, pointing to the specificity of Jewish identity as signifying membership in a 'world-historical community' rather than simply as adherents of a certain religious faith (chosen, but unable to choose). Milch writes,

As such, it is said, we Jews have a highly developed group consciousness. Thus, we confess our sins in the plural form, participating in a collective mass confession, because each of us is responsible not only got his own sins but, in some degree, for those of his fellow Jews. To put it differently, by reciting the confessions collectively we speak for the total community as well as for ourselves, showing that the Jewish community as a whole bears some of the responsibility for the transgressions of its members. In addition, the all-inclusive quality of



the collective confession, in which we each admit to virtually every sin imaginable and not just those that we have actually committed, provides us with a protective cloak of anonymity, so that no one has to stand up and beat his breast in full view of his friends and neighbours, as in a Maoist self-criticism session [or, indeed, in certain Protestant sects] (Milch 1988, 360)

In considering why this distinction between group confession and individual confession exists, Milch turns to literature for answers, concentrating on a genre well-known in the Christian tradition: the spiritual autobiography. What is most marked in Milch's account of that genre is the existence of a distinct and identifiable protagonist, a lonely believer who undergoes much adversity and suffering – tests of faith – before coming at last to full communion with their God. The Christian penitent is asked to accept God and to commit to their faith as an expression of this acceptance; in turn, they will be received in the spirit of the New Testament covenant of Christ's sacrifice, which promises the forgiveness of all sins and life in the world to come. In contrast,

Jews . . . come into their community by birth. Volition and personal fitness have nothing to do with it, and there is an immediate grant of tenure: once you are in you can never be thrown out. And ever after, no matter what a Jew does or fails to do, he stands before God, together with all other Jews, as a full participant in the special relationship that the Jews as a people claim to have with God (Milch 1988, 362).

In this reading, Milch modifies Wurtzel's assertion slightly: while the unconditional love of the New Testament God is foreclosed to Jews, belonging is assured. In this, the element of struggle that shapes the spiritual autobiography and gives it its heroic dimension (and even its narrative thrust) is absent, and protagonists are concerned with quite different questions: 'how to reconcile the evil which one has experienced in life with what Judaism teaches about God, or how to be an authentic Jew in the modern world, or whether to be a Jew at all' (Milch 1988, 361). This distinction is sharpened by Susan Balée's account of spiritual autobiography in America as it originates with the Puritan colonisation:

The Puritan journalists – of whom there were scores – kept records of their lives in the same way they kept records of their household accounts; they accounted for their lives in the book of deeds and thoughts reminiscent of God's account book, the one the Bible says will be brought forth on judgment Day. Everything in its place and a place for everything (America seemed to be the place for every thing). Although these Puritan writers were ostensibly concerned with their inner states . . . such external factors as the wilderness bordering the New England territories or the invasions of the settlements by hostile Indian tribes invariably influences their conversion narratives. Faith was achieved in adversity, grace through a spiritual progress paralleling the pilgrim's progress in subduing nature (Balée 1998, 53).

Balée's account here buttresses Milch's understanding of confession through emphasising the need to *account for oneself* in all parts of life as a feature of the Protestant Christian tradition, a model of self-scrutiny that has both economic and individualistic valences. What both Balée and Milch suggest indirectly is the close relationship between the figure of the protagonist in a novelistic sense and the Christian religious imaginary: this is broadly compatible with the form of the New Testament, which focuses on the life – and death – of Jesus Christ, a figure who is exceptional in his divinity and yet representative in his humanity. As the scene of the self expanded through colonisation, in which triumph over nature was rendered in the same terms as triumph over one's own



wild or sinful self, so too did the subject matter of the spiritual autobiography, transforming those early accounts of the female mystics into a much more masculinist and individual form.<sup>14</sup>

In its essence, the question of ‘representativeness’ as a function of ‘American autobiography’ is rendered quite differently in these distinct cultural and religious contexts. As intimated in the opening of this section, Bruce Springsteen’s bravura performance of working-class masculinity capitalises on just this element of the American imagination. Springsteen reimagines rock and roll as a vocation, with the full religious signification of that term: it is not the voice of God that Bruce hears, but the screaming of 80,000 fans, all of whom gather to worship at the altar of rock and roll – Springsteen is their priest, his performance the basis of their liturgy. Wurtzel recounts a longing for the ‘authentic’ suffering imagined in Springsteen’s ‘blue-collar blues,’ suggesting that such suffering had a tangible framework her own sadness seemed to lack: if she could be a character from a Springsteen song, all could be explained in terms of Marx’s theory of alienation (Wurtzel [1994] 1995, 44). The question, ‘what’s wrong with you?’ would, in short, have an easily legible and broadly acceptable answer: it ain’t me, babe. It’s capitalism.

When Wurtzel finally had her wish granted and was sent to spend a summer in Matawan, ‘a decaying industrial town in central New Jersey’ (Wurtzel [1994] 1995, 77), she discovered the true tedium that prompted Springsteen’s self-reinvention. Contrary to her expectations of a general atmosphere of malaise in which her own suffering might be subsumed, she discovered that she didn’t belong in this scene: ‘Where on earth would I fit in? I kept wondering. At camp everyone is so Jappy, and here in Matawan they’re not Jappy enough’ (Wurtzel [1994] 1995). The term ‘Jappy’ is an adaptation of the acronym for Jewish American Princess, a pervasive stereotypical identity from which Wurtzel felt excluded by the precariousness of her middle-class identity and her status as a child of divorce, amongst other elements: in this, we see that ambivalence about her Jewish identity and what it means that Friedling marks a feature of *Prozac Nation*, which resonates with Milch’s account of the questions specific to Jewish writing: ‘how to be an authentic Jew in the modern world, or whether to be a Jew at all.’ In Wurtzel’s work, however, this ambivalence emerges not only in relation to ethnic or religious identity, but also in terms of gender: what does it mean to be a young Jewish woman in America towards the end of the twentieth-century, and how are ethnic and cultural identities implicated in our inner or psychic states?

Per Couser once more, ‘genre is gendered’ (Couser 2012, 36), which we might also see as a succinct summation of Berlant’s work on sentimentality and intimate publics. Again, it is for this reason I insist we must move towards a more careful parsing of the intersections between fiction, non-fiction, and first-person writing in order to fully understand how the end of the twentieth-century paved the way for the literary culture of the twenty-first, showing a willingness as literary critics (and as readers) to think more broadly about formal ingenuity (a move with which I will confess I am not entirely easy, but one that seems more and more necessary as we move further into the twenty-first century). As she tells it, Wurtzel was a writer in search of a form for much of her life:

Maybe I could have picked up a guitar myself and written some rants of my own, but somehow the Upper West Side of Manhattan as a metaphor for lost and embittered youth was not nearly as resonant as Springsteen’s songs about hiding in the back streets or riding

the Tilt-A-Whirl or the sound of a calliope on the Jersey Shore. Nothing about my life seemed worthy of art or literature or even of just plain life. It seemed too stupid, too girlish, too middle-class (Wurtzel [1994] 1995, 44).

As we have seen already, Wurtzel's sense of the inadequacy of her suffering as a proper subject for art stems from a wider pejorative cultural attitude towards mental health and, more generally, the suffering of women, where this latter stems from a pervasive misogyny that is not without religious roots. The very fact that Springsteen is licenced to appear by his adoption of an authority to which he has no 'proper' claim, through his mere vocation, is not unlike the position of the Catholic priest, who professes to mediate between the divine and the human. Women are entirely degraded within the Catholic church, as the prohibition on marriage for members of the clergy intimates, and they may not appear in any position of authority. Although Protestantism allows for the presence of female ministers, its Puritan lineage in America enshrines a distrust of the feminine through its Catholic inheritances still all too evident as common currency.

It is with all this in mind that I propose a reformulation of the generic category of *Prozac Nation*. Given that Wurtzel belongs to a confessional tradition in which the self does not appear (except as part of the whole), the individualistic connotations of memoir seem ill-suited to name it. Where Worden suggests that, 'memoir in our contemporary moment is uniquely outfitted to articulate the ways in which neoliberal reforms have isolated and limited, while championing and privileging, the individual' (Worden 2017, 161), I think that we need to be more careful about the particulars of different genres of life-writing, which is evident in my attention to the impact of online life-writing as a context for reading Wurtzel and, indeed, for working through the afterlife of New Journalism.<sup>15</sup> The charge of self-obsession levelled at Wurtzel seems a little confused to me – did these readers skim the part where Wurtzel reveals her fear that 'without depression, [she'd] have no personality at all' (Wurtzel Wurtzel, [1994] 1995, 288), a fear so great that her doctor suggests it might be the impetus behind a suicide attempt? This book is about depression and its treatment, at a moment when both were receiving much public attention. That many have misread it as a book 'about' Wurtzel is, I think, testament to the power of her journalistic voice and her capacity to take the reader 'inside' depression.

Wurtzel was a journalist by inclination and by trade, writing at a moment during which journalism was undergoing rapid changes, which can be traced, in part at least, to the presence of Wallace as journalist and literary celebrity. That many readers conflate Wallace-as-journalist with Wallace-as-author is hardly surprising, given that the same stylistic tics and turns of phrase occur across the writer's oeuvre, as demonstrated by Egan's ventriloquism in *Goon Squad*. That this conflation leads to a collapse between Dave Wallace, person, and David Foster Wallace, authorial signature, is hardly surprising either, given the first-person voice of his journalistic writing and the long-standing conflation of style and personality in the framework of fiction writing. Looming large in the popular imagination, Dave Wallace was seen as a writer of the human condition, and much beloved for it, despite his numerous and awful transgressions. To be granted such love – such unconditional attention, such affirmation – the safest bet for a woman in the public eye is, it seems, to follow the rules. To play nice; to not wield one's power, or brilliance, or beauty, too readily. In the midst of a patriarchal society in which misogyny

in common currency and female suffering a tabloid spectacle, failure to conform brings damnation.<sup>16</sup> It seems remarkably suspect to me that the same thing for which Wurtzel was derided – an experiential journalistic mode of writing in which the ‘literary’ meets the ‘popular’ – is so close to what Wallace was celebrated for as he, like Springsteen, became a sort of cultural institution, albeit one whose reputation relied on the anxiety of a certain ‘fraudulence’ rather than a celebration of it.<sup>17</sup>

If you are a Dave, or a Bruce, you can play fast and loose with the relationship between art and life. For Elizabeth Wurtzel, whose sense of being was so much defined by failure to follow the ‘rules’ – religious, social, normative – there has been no such latitude. If the identity of ‘woman’ defines and circumscribes our being and our artistic capacity, why, in the name of any God, would anyone seek to find a place within these forms and structures for themselves? If the strictures of literary form – or academic criticism, or any other form of creative production – do not serve us, why should we adhere to them? Why should we care? Perhaps because we are social beings, who exist in the world and do our best to make our experiences legible; because sometimes, adherence to these rules is matter of cultural adulation and sometimes, as it was for Wurtzel, it is a matter of the utmost seriousness: a matter of freedom, and of being able to survive in the world into which one is born. Who we care about, how we care, and how we are cared for: this is the stuff of life itself.

Wurtzel’s journalistic instincts and the predications of the marketplace might result in an oddly uncomfortable ‘voice of a generation’ reading of her work, but it seems to me that making people uncomfortable is precisely where Wurtzel’s talent resides. Like rock ‘n’ roll according to Bruce, Elizabeth Wurtzel wanted to break the rules and maybe, even, to have some fun. The discomfort engendered by Wurtzel’s writing is an expression of a persistent anxiety regarding the nature of independence as framed in the twentieth-century American imagination. What dependency expresses is a need for care (the most basic form of pleasure) which can be seen too as a need for attention – being attended to is the essence of care. Being attended to means expressing your needs (verbally or otherwise) and having them heard and met. Dependency signals an over-reliance on whatever other gives us this feeling: it affirms our sense of ourselves and the world as we see it, unlike inter-dependency, which models a mutual recognition. We can tend to ourselves with ephemeral pleasures: the ‘highs’ of drug and alcohol use that mimic the feelings of security we imagine as generated by an unconditional love that permits us to be ourselves in any form (this is what Wurtzel is denied though finds to some degree through asserting her lovelessness and still retaining some ‘functionality,’ both social and academic: she feels compelled at all times to fulfil that promise made by her mere existence), or the beatific attention of an adoring audience, for Springsteen and (during his lifetime, at least) Wallace. What we want, though, more than anything, is to believe in ourselves; that is, to be real for ourselves. For this, we need another to affirm us. Why do we use the phrase ‘a cry for attention’ with derision? Everyone deserves to be attended to, tended to, without this attention morphing into the more insidious ‘attentions,’ as in the dynamic of seduction, where interest becomes a form of interference and motivation must be suspect (the great Wallacian anxiety). I have no doubt that Elizabeth Wurtzel was a fucking nightmare. *Prozac Nation* is her dream diary, and we are fortunate to get to read this rule-breaking document of a mind at war with itself. If it helps at all now, Lizzie, we love you. You were rock ‘n’ roll. You are.

## Notes

1. For more on this, see Todd M Hillhouse, and Joseph H Porter, 'A Brief History of the Development of Antidepressant Drugs: From Monoamines to Glutamate.' *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology* 23:1 (2015), 1–21, which also gives a good insight into the experimental application of psychopharmacological medications and the relationship between function, disorder, and diagnosis.
2. One could draw this reading out in a more contemporary context too through exploration of Meghan Markle's response to the racism and classism of the English tabloid system and the decision to sever ties from the Royal Family, made possible in part because of her own celebrity and media nous.
3. This is not to undermine the work of Nirvana, and indeed I have written on the close connections between Kurt Cobain's writing and the political praxis of riot grrrl elsewhere; nevertheless, sample lyrics from this particular song include: 'I wish I was like you, easily amused / Find my nest to salt, everything's my fault / I'll take all the blame, aqua seafoam shame / Sunburn, freezer burn, choking on the ashes of her enemy.' Wurtzel was, I'll remind the reader, a prize-winning music journalist.
4. For reasons of space I will offer only a brief sketch of these shifts here; those interested can find more on this elsewhere in my work – see again Malone CWW 2021.
5. This attitude seems oddly prevalent in more contemporary literary fiction, such as Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts* (2021) or Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) and indeed the essay that spawned it, 'How Do We Write Now?' (2018); Jennifer Egan's *Look At Me* (2001) and *Black Box* (2012) also deserve some mention in this category.
6. An important innovation in the Facebook model often forgotten now was its emphasis on the visual documentation of user's lives, and certainly in its early years photo sharing was a primary function of the platform. One can trace a shift in the framing of online identity through this evolution from anonymity to visibility.
7. One might, of course, trace through the rise of the creative writing programme, though per Mark McGurl's work, the discovery of one's voice is not necessarily straightforward in such contexts; nevertheless, 'find your voice' is one of the three principles he suggests 'accurately frame the implicit poetics of the program' (McGurl 2011, 34) – the others are 'write what you know,' which I borrow here too, and 'show don't tell,' which is rather the reverse in the first-person form I am tentatively tracing here.
8. A more careful thinking through of the precise shape of this shifting relationship between personality and style is clearly necessary, and might emerge as part of a continuation of McGurl's work once we consider those newer non-institutional frameworks within which writers are made; in my teaching, I look to Roxane Gay as an exemplary figure in this regard.
9. It is by now common knowledge that Wallace subjected Karr to repeated instances of abusive behaviour, a fact acknowledged only in passing in Max's biography. In a Tweet on 5 May 2018, Karr publicly affirmed both the abuse and Max's decision to ignore the documentary evidence of it, which she presented to him while he was writing the biography.
10. I have no interest in the Nietzschean framework Roiland uses to read Wallace's journalism, although such a framework is in some ways wonderfully exemplary of the difference in cultural attitudes to the serious suffering of the Great White Male (sorry, Melville) and – well, everyone else, for the most part of the twentieth century anyway.
11. This is merely one quality that might define experiential journalism as it emerges in the 1990s and beyond; there are many others we might consider in trying to outline the genre, including the heightened awareness of audience, interactivity, and an increasingly editorial or essayistic element (this might also be connected to the rise of 'truthiness' or 'post-truth'). This is not an exact or exhaustive list but it gives some sense of the distinction between this mode and that of New Journalism, pointing too to the technological transformations that have shifted the medium or site of journalistic reportage in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.
12. Italics in original.

13. As stated earlier, the impact of SSRIs was massive due to their relatively manageable side-effects, and Wurtzel was not the only author to understand this: Meri Nana-Ama Danquah's *Willow Weep for Me* (1998) also described the impact of the medication through the prism of attitudes to mental health or states of psychic distress in the black community.
14. One need only think of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) to see these dynamics at work.
15. In wider terms, this points to a certain frustration on my part with the use of neoliberalism as an explanatory cultural logic: I believe that this is better articulated by way of 'the attention economy,' per Franck.
16. This is explored at length in Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), a forerunner of Wurtzel's work. Like Wurtzel, Kaysen suffered a certain amount of literary misrecognition, writing *Girl* as an anthropological account of her time in a psychiatric institution only to find it branded and read as 'memoir' (Merrigan 2018).
17. For those who continue to doubt, I suggest a quick reading of Wurtzel's 2010 essay on intellectual copyright (Wurtzel, The Pop Culture Clause, *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* 47: 1 (2010), 1 - 10).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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